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# FSIS



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Food Safety  
and Inspection  
Service

Information and  
Legislative Affairs  
Office

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# BACKGROUND

## Protecting the Public from Foodborne Illness:

## The Food Safety and Inspection Service

The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), a public health agency in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, protects consumers by ensuring that meat and poultry products are safe, wholesome, and accurately labeled.

FSIS regulates meat and poultry products that account for a third of consumer spending for food, with an annual retail value of \$120 billion. FSIS regulates all raw beef, pork, lamb, chicken, and turkey, as well as approximately 250,000 different processed meat and poultry products, including hams, sausage, soups, stews, pizzas, and frozen dinners, (any product that contains 2% or more cooked poultry or 3% or more raw meat). Consumers purchase these products packaged with 500,000 different USDA approved labels.

### FSIS Activities

Under the Federal Meat Inspection Act and the Poultry Products Inspection Act, FSIS inspects all meat and poultry sold in interstate and foreign commerce, including imported products. Approximately 7,400 Federal inspectors carry out inspection laws in some 6,200 plants.

Inspectors check animals before and after slaughter, visually examining over 6 billion poultry carcasses and 125 million livestock carcasses, including beef, pork, and lamb, each year. They prevent diseased animals from entering the food supply and examine carcasses for visible defects that can affect safety and quality. FSIS also inspects products during processing, handling, and packaging to ensure that they are safe and truthfully labeled.

To address specific concerns, inspectors can test for the presence of pathogenic microorganisms and violative drug and chemical residues. The Agency operates three field laboratories to provide analytical support.

FSIS sets standards for a range of activities associated with the production of meat and poultry products. For instance, the Agency evaluates and sets standards for food ingredients, additives, and compounds used to prepare and package meat and poultry products. All plant facilities and equipment must adhere to FSIS standards and be approved before they can be used. The Agency sets labeling standards and approves labels for meat and poultry products. Standards also are set for certain slaughter and processing

activities, such as plant sanitation and thermal processing.

FSIS develops and improves analytical procedures for detecting microbiological and chemical adulterants and infectious and toxic agents in meat and poultry products. The Agency also develops new methods of inspection to better protect the public health.

The Agency evaluates the effectiveness of its programs through systematic and special reviews. It also responds to microbiological, residue, and other contamination incidents and, when appropriate, seeks voluntary recall of products by firms.

Through the Agency's Meat and Poultry Hotline (1-800-535-4555) and consumer education programs, the public is informed on how to properly handle, prepare, and store meat and poultry products to minimize the growth of foodborne pathogens.

## **Current Initiatives**

Foodborne illness is recognized as a significant public health problem in the United States. While precise data on the incidence of illness associated with meat and poultry products are limited, data from varied sources suggest that foodborne microbial pathogens may account for up to 7 million cases of foodborne illness each year, and up to 7,000 deaths. Of these, nearly 5 million cases of illness and more than 4,000 deaths may be associated with meat and poultry products.

FSIS is pursuing a broad and long-term science-based strategy to improve the safety of meat and poultry products and to better protect public health. FSIS is undertaking a farm-to-table approach by taking steps to improve the safety of meat and poultry at each step in the food production, processing, distribution, and marketing chain. These steps are designed to focus more attention on the risk of microbial contamination, the Nation's most significant food safety problem. The Agency's goal is to reduce contamination as much as possible by setting public health-oriented standards for pathogenic microorganisms, building the principle of prevention into the production and inspection processes, and fostering the development and use of new technology.

In addition to a number of in-plant improvements, FSIS is working closely with the Food and Drug Administration to ensure food safety at the retail level and to establish Federal standards for the safe handling of food during transportation, distribution and storage. FSIS also will work with producers and others to develop and implement food safety measures that can be taken on the farm and before animals enter the slaughter facility to reduce the risk of harmful contamination of meat and poultry products.

## **For More Information**

Media Inquiries:	(202) 720-9113
Congressional Inquiries:	(202) 720-3897
Consumers:	
Call USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline at:	1-800-535-4555
In the Washington, D.C. area, call:	(202) 720-3333